

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 000268

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR PRM/A, PRM/AFR, PRM/ANE, PRM/MCE, NEA/ELA, AND AF
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CVIS](#) [EG](#) [SU](#) [UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: SUDAN REFUGEES: EGYPT RELEASES ADDITIONAL
DETAINEES, PLEDGES TO STRICTLY ABIDE BY TREATY OBLIGATIONS
AND COORDINATE WITH UNHCR.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Reference: Cairo 170
Cairo 132
Cairo 58

Summary

1. (SBU) MFA Assistant Minister for American Affairs briefed the DCM January 18 on the status of detained Sudanese asylum seekers in Egypt. Hefny clarified that 153 Sudanese had been released January 17, with an unspecified number of others to be released shortly. UNHCR, he said, had been given until January 26 to complete its review of cases. UNHCR Cairo confirmed January 18 that about 250 Sudanese detainees - all of the women and children and some Darfurians - were to be released. The GOE publicly named 27 Sudanese killed during the December 30 confrontation, trying to quell rumors of much larger numbers. UNHCR has completed initial screening of all detainees and found a mixture of credible and non-credible claims. There are now unconfirmed reports that the GOE has decided against any forcible returns although MFA has told us of an "internal consensus" within the GOE to cooperate with UNHCR to ensure there would be no detentions or deportations inconsistent with Egypt's UN obligations. The Sudanese are detained in harsh but humane conditions. UNHCR says it has "sufficient" privacy to conduct interviews in the detention centers, although there are reports of mischief making by the Sudanese Embassy. Those who have been released have been absorbed back into their communities with support from UNHCR, WFP and NGOs. UNHCR Cairo is again operational and registering between 2-300 Sudanese a day. End Summary

More Sudanese Released

2. (SBU) GOE Assistant Foreign Minister Ali Al Hefney briefed the DCM January 18 that all women and children and most Darfurians detained December 30 would be released from Cairo detention centers Jan 18-19. UNHCR has accordingly dispatched teams to the detention centers to assist with the releases. This will leave around 213 Sudanese asylum seekers in detention (2,100 were detained December 30, 2005). Tonight's releases follow an MFA communique issued January 17 listing 27 names of those killed during the police action in an apparent attempt to squash rumors that many more people were killed. Hefney advised that autopsies were being carried out and forensic reports would be released within the next few days. MFA UN Affairs Office Director Hany Saleem clarified separately to poloff January 18 that there was an "internal consensus" within the GOE that there would be no detentions and no deportations inconsistent with GOE obligations as a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Furthermore the GOE would coordinate fully with UNHCR prior to any deportations, according to Saleem.

UNHCR Update

3. (SBU) Radhouane Nouicer, Deputy Director of UNHCR's Central Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East Bureau (CASWANAME) briefed Refcoord on the current status of detainees. Nouicer is managing the situation in the absence of country representative Saad al Attar (currently in Geneva for medical treatment). Greg Balke, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer from Geneva, joined the briefing. Balke is leading the teams screening detained refugees.

Screening Completed

14. (SBU) Nouicer reported that UNHCR has now screened all of the Sudanese in three detention centers, Abou Zabat, Shedin Al Kom and Kanater. UNHCR has been unable to verify rumors that more Sudanese from the December 30 incident are being held in other detention centers. The GOE has denied this and UNHCR has found no evidence to the contrary (although there could be Sudanese in detention for other offenses).

15. (SBU) Today's releases will leave about 213 in detention (2,100 were originally detained). About thirteen are Darfurians whom UNHCR believes should be released immediately in accordance with UNHCR's declared policy that Darfurian asylum seekers should be granted prima facie refugee status.

Further Evaluation Required for the Rest

16. (SBU) The remainder of the detainees are males - reportedly a mixture of legitimate asylum seekers who lost their documentation (20), newcomers who have not previously registered (50) and previously closed cases that were evaluated and denied some time ago (130). Of these, UNHCR has identified about 30 who have no credible claim. The rest appear to have some grounds for claiming refugee status and need to be evaluated further. Some of these claims (30) have been deemed "not manifestly unfounded", and others may have a sur place claim relating to their involvement in the demonstration or the attention they have been receiving from the Sudanese Embassy (which has been observed taking names and photographs of detainees).

Conditions Harsh but Humane

17. (SBU) According to Balke the Sudanese are detained in harsh but generally humane conditions. UNHCR has assisted by supplying food, clothing, medical help and counseling. Balke says his screening teams have been able to provide sufficient privacy for refugee interviews although the situation is not ideal. UNHCR would prefer to have all of the refugees released so that they can be dealt with in a more acceptable environment.

Sudanese Embassy Involved

18. (SBU) UNHCR reports that the Sudanese Embassy has been visiting the detention centers and intimidating detainees by taking names and photographs. UNHCR believes this goes beyond normal consular responsibilities/activities since the detainees are in the middle of evaluation for possible refugee status, and have not sought Embassy assistance.

Deadline for Deportations Unclear

19. (SBU) There is continuing confusion over the deadline set by the GOE to complete UNHCR evaluations (before deportations). The previous deadline of January 15 has passed and UNHCR is receiving conflicting reports that the deadline has now been moved to January 23 or January 26, and one report that it has been lifted entirely. There have also been media reports (Al Ahras of January 16) that the GOE will not forcibly return any of the detainees. UNHCR is attempting to verify these reports. UNHCR expects to deliver the results of its screening to MFA before the end of this week.

UNHCR Requests

10. (SBU) Nouicer met with MFA January 16 and argued the following points:

- There should be no forcible return of recognized refugees;
- There needs to be an in-depth enquiry about the December 30 incident;
- All detainees need to be released (those facing criminal charges could be prosecuted);
- The GOE needs to produce the names of the deceased;
- UNHCR and the GOE need to get together to review their respective roles vis--vis refugees and distribute responsibilities accordingly

11. (SBU) UNHCR will continue to press for the GOE to assume greater responsibility for identifying and protecting refugees in accordance with its obligations as a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR is currently doing it all - identification, screening, protection, assistance and

resettlement - without GOE help, and believes a more proactive role by the GOE is needed at an early stage to define who are refugees and who are the responsibility of the state.

Former Detainees

112. (SBU) UNHCR says former detainees seem to have been absorbed back into their communities and are not approaching UNHCR's office for individual attention, although NGOs and UNHCR's implementing partners are continuing to monitor and assist the Sudanese refugee population. Balke says the infrastructure for the delivery of food and material support for those refugees who have been released from detention "remains effective". WFP has agreed to supply sufficient food for three months to 4,000 refugees, and various NGOs are helping with food, and other material supplies. The USG has donated \$20,000 for clothing and other non-food items.

Criminal Charges Possible

113. (SBU) UNHCR has heard that the Egyptian Prosecutor General will decide on possible criminal charges relating to the demonstration and its aftermath within the next few days.

UNHCR Cairo Now Operational

114. (SBU) After a three and a half month hiatus, UNHCR Cairo is now open for asylum seekers to register and to have their cases heard. Nouicer reports that Sudanese are rushing to register with UNHCR at the rate of 2-300 a day to obtain the limited assistance and protection afforded by UNHCR's Yellow Card.

Ricciardone